

DEFENDING



Members of Minnesota's Weapons of Mass Destruction Civil Response Team search an area for "suspected contaminants" during their final certification at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

The Home Front

Story by MSG Bob Haskell Photos by Paul Disney



THE Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on America created a critical and urgent need for beefed-up security nationwide.

Soon after the attacks, Army Chief of Staff GEN Eric K. Shinseki told National Guard officials he wanted 17 new civil support teams — which can respond to chemical, biological and radiological threats anywhere in the country — ready to support homeland security. They were to supplement 10 existing CSTs.

By mid-November, 14 of the 17 teams had been organized to help firefighters, police and other civilian emergency responders. Then, months ahead of schedule, the teams were evaluated at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Three other teams that have been organized and trained since spring 2000 were, at press time, scheduled to undergo their final tests for certification in early 2002, said LTC Gordon Fuller of the Tennessee Army National Guard.

Additionally, the Defense Department authorized full-time teams to be certified in Alabama, Kansas, Michigan, Tennessee and West Virginia in 2003. Twenty-four federally certified CSTs were on duty by November, as were thousands of Guard soldiers pulling security with police at 424 commercial airports.

President George W. Bush had announced that Guard soldiers would reinforce airport security checkpoints for up to six months, and he promised to increase the National Guard security force to 8,000 for the holiday season.



D.C. National Guard soldiers were called up to provide security for the Capitol Building, something which hadn't happened since the rioting of 1968.

Senior Master Sgt. Chris Martin

Guard soldiers patrolled railroad stations, bridges and tunnels. And state governors had called on Army and Air National Guard troops to help protect key structures in America's transportation system, from Grand Central and Pennsylvania stations in New York City to San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge.

Guard troops also reinforced security at nuclear power plants. And District of Columbia Army Guard military police helped U.S. Capitol Police provide security around the nation's capital.

In New York, meantime, some 200 Guard soldiers were called up for 90 days of security duty at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

And the CSTs from Colorado, Massachusetts and Texas are

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providing security for the Winter Olympic Games in Utah.

Earlier, the New York CST became part of the massive security force for the New York City Marathon and the three World Series games played at Yankee Stadium. And the first of California's two CSTs was pressed into service for the four World-Series games in Phoenix, Ariz.

New York's 2nd CST — one of the nation's original 10 — introduced federal and state agencies to the CSTs in general the day the two hijacked jetliners toppled the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan.

Members of the team spent several days testing "Ground Zero" for chemical and biological agents amid the smoking rubble and reassuring other emergency workers that terrorists had not used any of the deadly agents in the attack.

"I like this Guard team because it trains to do this 365 days a year," said Thomas Graham, commander of the New York Police Department's Disorder Control Team. "It has a



mobile lab and bio-chemical testing equipment that we don't yet have.

"We were always prepared to deal with explosives," said Graham, whose team was among those that responded when bombs blasted the World Trade Center in 1993 and the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in 1995.

Requests for CST assistance mounted when anthrax spores began showing up in the mail and people began theorizing about the possibility of more-deadly biological agents being released in the environment.

Even before it was federally certified, the Minnesota team was asked by Gov. Jesse Ventura to test parts of the state capitol, the governor's mansion and state mail centers for anthrax, said Air Guard Lt. Col. Earl Juskowiak, the team's commander. The tests were all negative.

New York Guard soldiers, meanwhile, were searching a steady stream of rental trucks and other vehicles randomly selected by police officers before being allowed to cross the East River into Manhattan. Guard troops were making sure that drivers' licenses and paperwork were in order, and that the vehicles weren't carrying cargo

that could create more terror for New York City.

"Most of the Guard troops are working on the Brooklyn end of the bridges, because we're more concerned about trucks going into Manhattan," said New York Police Sgt. Stephen Patino. "They can't take any direct action unless a police officer is present."

They were, however, in the right places at the right time to help civilian authorities close the bridges and tunnels leading to Manhattan on Nov. 12, after American Airlines Flight 587 crashed into a Queens neighborhood moments after taking off from JFK International Airport.

"You're up to the challenge. You are doing the job. We are so proud of you," N.Y. Governor George Pataki told Guard troops gathered at New York City's Park Avenue Armory.

"It's not practice. It's not training. It's not anything but the real thing," said MG George Garrett, commander of the New York Army Guard's 42nd Infantry Division. He is leading the task force that is helping to protect America's largest city. "We're running this just as if we were in Afghanistan getting ready to roll out our tanks." □



Members of the Virginia National Guard's 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry, begin a security shift at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, D.C. Dulles was the departure point for the airliner that slammed into the Pentagon on Sept. 11.